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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
TRU WASTE DRUM STAGING BUILDING  
LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY

**PROPOSED ACTION:** The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the TRU Waste Drum Staging Building at Technical Area (TA) 55, Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), Los Alamos, New Mexico (DOE-EA-1131), January, 1996, analyzes the Department of Energy (DOE) proposal to stage sealed containers of transuranic (TRU) and TRU mixed waste in an existing support building at LANL's Plutonium Facility (TA-55). TA-55 is LANL's main facility for plutonium research. The main laboratory building for plutonium work within TA-55 is the Plutonium Facility Building 4, or PF-4. At present containers of TRU and TRU mixed waste are staged in the basement of PF-4.

The proposed action is to modify an existing support structure (Building 185), a prefabricated metal building on a concrete foundation located adjacent to Building PF-4, and to operate it as a temporary TRU and TRU mixed waste staging facility. The TRU and TRU mixed wastes would be contained in sealed 55-gallon drums and standard waste boxes as they await approval to be transported away from TA-55. After receiving documented approval, the containers would then be transported to a longer term TRU and TRU mixed waste storage area at TA-54. The TRU and TRU mixed wastes are generated from plutonium operations carried out in PF-4. The drum staging building would also be used to store and prepare for use new, empty TRU waste containers.

The EA compares the effects of the proposed action with the effects of staging TRU and TRU mixed wastes in the basement of PF-4 (the "no action" alternative). DOE considered, but dismissed from further analysis, alternatives including the construction of a new facility at LANL, moving excess containers to the uncovered storage pad at TA-55 and covering the containers, and operating in another building at LANL.

The rationale for dismissing these alternatives was based on the fact that none of them would reasonably meet the purpose and need for agency action. Only the preferred alternative would reasonably 1) alleviate the crowded TRU waste holding conditions at PF-4 while awaiting transport approval necessary to release the waste containers for transport away from TA-55, and 2) provide adequate staging room for all the TRU waste containers generated by that facility in a manner that precludes the intrusion of water into the containers.

**ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:** The EA indicates that the environmental effects of the proposed action under normal operating conditions would be associated with disposing of construction debris generated from modifying the interior of Building 185. This construction debris, approximately 5 cubic meters (6.48 cubic yards) would be disposed in the Los Alamos County Landfill where it would be a small addition to the 12,200 tons of garbage, trash, and rubble disposed annually by LANL. Working conditions inside the PF-4 air lock and basement would be improved. Because no new construction is involved, no cultural resources or threatened or endangered species would be affected. Likewise, no floodplain or wetland areas would be affected. No solid waste management units or

surface contamination areas have been identified at the proposed staging building. No environmental justice issues have been identified.

At present, the 10 workers involved with TRU drum management activities at PF-4 accumulate doses of about 50 mrem per year from all activities. The dose from drum staging is not measured separately. The cumulative worker dose over the life of the project (10 people, 50 mrem/year for 20 years) would not exceed 10 person-rem. Workers in this proposed project and the no-action alternative (i.e., continuing to stage drums in the basement of PF-4) would not be expected to develop any excess fatal cancers from radiation exposure they may receive during normal operations. It is not possible to estimate a decrease in the dose to other non-involved individuals in the basement of PF-4. However, their doses could be reduced somewhat because there would be a reduction in the number of TRU waste containers in the basement. There is no exposure from TRU container staging and certification operations to the public or to LANL personnel outside the PF-4 basement during routine operations in the no-action alternative.

The most credible accident scenario from staging operations is a drum dropping from a height exceeding 1.2 meters (4 feet), rupturing, and spilling a part of the contents. This event could occur in the no-action alternative or the proposed action. The potential releases and impacts are exactly the same.

No new environmental permits would be required to move staging operations from the basement of PF-4 to the existing support structure, Building 185.

On January 18, 1996, DOE invited review and comment on the preapproval EA from the State of New Mexico, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and four American Indian Pueblos: Cochiti, Jemez, Santa Clara and San Ildefonso. In addition, DOE made the pre-decisional draft EA available to Los Alamos County and the general public at the same time it was provided to the state and pueblos by placing it in the Los Alamos National Laboratory Community Reading Room and the DOE Public Reading Room in Albuquerque. Also, local stakeholder groups were notified of the availability of the pre-decisional draft EA on November 13, 1995. Only one set of comments was received on the pre-decisional draft EA and it came from the USFWS. This set of comments recommended adoption of the preferred alternative.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For further information on this proposal, this Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI), or the DOE's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review program concerning proposals at LANL, please contact:

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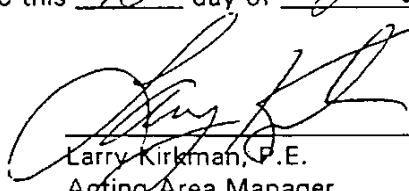
Copies of the environmental assessment and this FONSI will be made available for public review at the Los Alamos National Laboratory Community Reading Room, 1450 Central

Ave., Suite 101, Los Alamos, New Mexico, 87544 at (505) 665-2127 or (800) 543-2342.

Copies will also be made available in the DOE Public Reading Room, located in the Atomic Museum, 20358, Wyoming Boulevard, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87185 at (505) 845-6670.

**FINDING:** The United States Department of Energy finds that there would be no significant impact from proceeding with its proposal to to stage TRU and TRU mixed waste in Building 185, an existing support structure adjacent to PF-4. DOE makes this Finding of No Significant Impact pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 [42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.], the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ.) regulations [40 CFR 1500] and the DOE NEPA regulations [10 CFR 1021]. Based on the environmental assessment that analyses the relocation of these staging operations, the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action which would significantly affect the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, no environmental impact statement is required for this proposal.

Signed in Los Alamos, New Mexico this 12 day of Feb, 1996<sup>6</sup>.



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